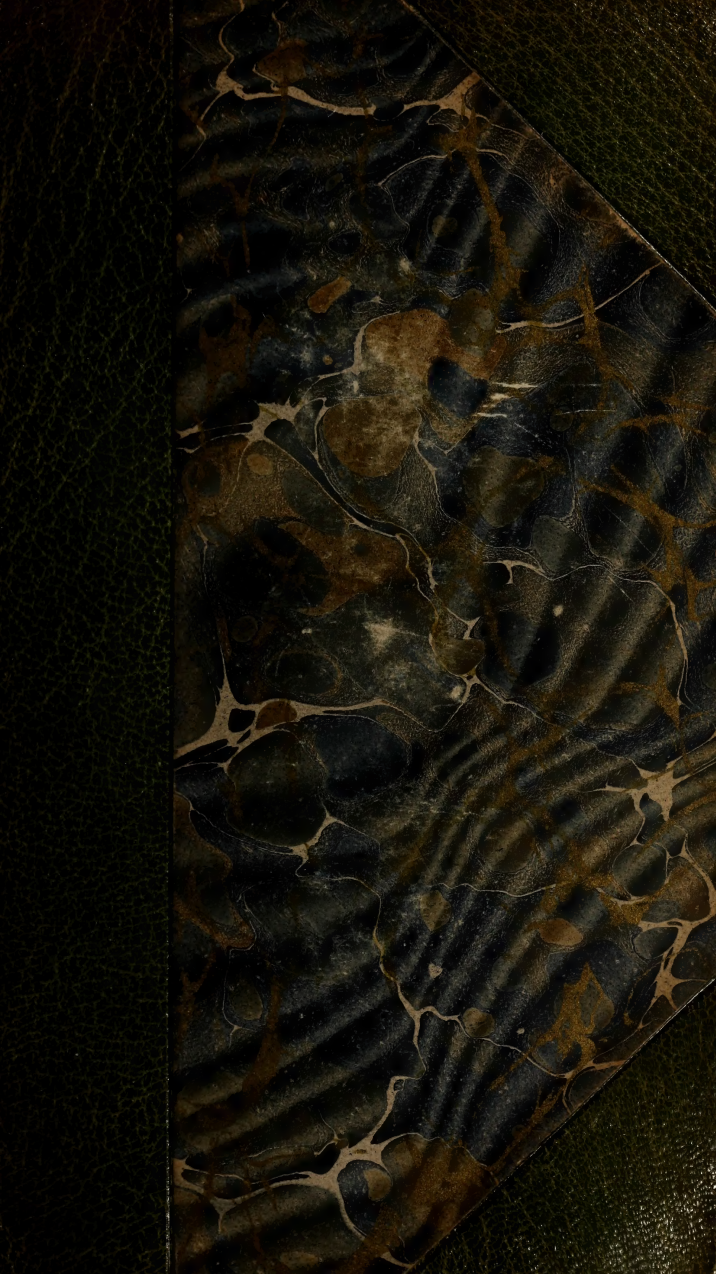




Albert of Werdendorff; 1403

OR, THE

MIDNIGHT EMBRACE.

A ROMANCE.

From the German.

BY SARAH WALKINSON.

To which

The Danger of Pleasure

STIRLING:

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ALBERT OF WERDENDORFF;

OR, THE

MIDNIGHT EMBRACE.

ALBERT, lord of the ancient but
flaely castle of Werdendorff was
young nobleman of elegant person,
d fascinating manners; but his heart
is prone to deceit, and he paid very
le attention to the fulfilling of either
igious or moral duties.

About half a league from the castle
Werdendorff stood an humble cot-
ge, the mistress of which, the fair Jo-
phine, had attracted the notice of
ord Albert in his morning rides; he
requently taking the air on horseback
ross the moor where her lowly dwell-
g arose to view.

Josephine was rather above the mid-
e size; her limbs finely proportioned.
he colour of her face was such as to

give a highly favourable impression every beholder. The lustre of her large black eyes was tempered by ineffable sweetness that appeared in the every motion ; while the waving ringlets of her luxuriant brown hair completed the tout ensemble of this lovely mortal.

Beauty and innocence were the ornaments Josephine possessed. Her father had been a subaltern officer in the emperor's service. Her mother was the only child of a very poor, but very respectable pastor. Francisco the father of Josephine, fell in the field of battle when his little girl had just attained her fifth year. His disconsolate widow retired with her trifling pension from Vienna, where she had hitherto resided, to the vicinity of Werdendorff where she lived with her darling child in a peaceful seclusion, now so congenial to her feelings.

Her pension being inadequate for their support, the amiable widow toiled with her needle to supply the wants of herself and Josephine. The education of her loved child she attended with the most sedulous care, and w

mply repaid by the docility of her beloved pupil.

Josephine had just completed her sixteenth year, when her revered parent was seized with a complaint, which soon terminated her existence.

The short time that intervened between her being first attacked by this fatal indisposition, and her dissolution, was spent by the anxious mother in attempts to prepare her daughter for that event, in advising her with regard to her subsequent conduct and arrangements.

Josephine listened to her virtuous counsels with attention, and while the tears chased each other down her pallid cheeks, promised a strict adherence to the wishes of her dying parent. Alas ! how little to be depended on are too oft the promises and resolutions of mortals !

The remains of the mother of Josephine being decently interred that for-
 wing girl soon felt herself obliged to want less indulgence to heart-felt grief, at the might toil for each day's bread. Her parent's pension expired with her ; and our fair maid to pay the rent of her cottage, and defray her necessary expenditures, was obliged to leave her

humble pallet with the first salute of the lark, and ply her needle with assiduous and unremitting industry.

But the labour of this artless girl was crowned with success. An embroidress who lived in an adjacent town, supplied Josephine with constant work. The hours destined to employment, were lightened by the cheerful song. And now and then, to add a little variety to the scene, she joined her village companions in a rural dance beneath the shade of some spreading chestnuts.

Happy, virtuous and respected lived Josephine for the first three years after her mother's decease. She was then predestinated to experience a fatal reverse; the veil of innocent simplicity was to be torn from her mind, and the vacancy filled up by the dark cloud of guilt.

Albert of Werdendorf beheld the maid in all her native pride of beauty, softened by angelic modesty and her unconsciousness of the superlative charms she possessed. Albert longed to call this fair flower his own not as a tender admirer, to protect her honourably from all rude storms, but as a rude spoiler, that wantonly plucked

he rose from its native branch, and then, regardless of its beauties, casts it to wither on the ground.

It would be needless, and indeed, an unpleasing task, to describe minutely the various arts that Lord Albert descended to, in order to seduce the unsuspecting victim of his deceptions. His superior rank, fortune, and connections, were so many circumstances to furnish him with favourable pretexts to forward his designs.

Though Albert was lord of the castle of Werdendorff, and had there a splendid establishment, yet he depended on his father, the Marquis de Baldarao, for a princely addition to his possessions: He made Josephine to believe, that it was impossible for him to espouse her, during his father's life; but called on heaven and every saint to witness the inviolable faith and constancy he would always maintain towards her: that he would always regard her as his wife: and as soon as he should be free to offer his hand, their marriage should be legally solemnized. Josephine had many virtuous sentiments; but Albert by sophistry, overcame those scruples; and the unfortunate maiden added one

more to the many that suffer their credulous hearts to be seduced by the wily serpent, like objects of their tender and faithful love.

Josephine's breast was no longer the abode of serenity. In Albert's presence her spirits were elated: she listened with delight to the repetition of his vows, and, blinded by delusive passion, esteemed herself one of the happiest among the happy. But in the long hours of solitude, she was oft times miserable. Regret, remorse, and apprehension, would enter, through obtrusive guests. From the casement of her cottage, Josephine could behold the stately castle of Werderdorff, and discern its portals opened for the reception of guests invited to the noble banquets and festive balls, which often made its lofty roofs resound with their mirth. On these occasions Josephine would sigh and ponder on the wide difference between herself and lord Albert in their stations, and wonder if her fond hopes would ever be realized.

At midnight, when all the inhabitants of the castle were wrapt in repose was the time that lord Albert paid his visits to Josephine's cottage, which

hour was mutually chosen by the lovers for their interviews, that they might elude the observation of those around themselves.

When Cynthia, hid in clouds, gave borrow to light lord Albert in his progress over the dark and fenny moor, Josephine would place a taper at her easement, to guide him to her humble abode.

Ah, ill-fated maid! too soon will you experience the dire truth, that men betray, and that vows can be broken; and that illicit love, though at first ardent, will soon decay, and leave nought but wretchedness behind.

Albert had been Josephine's favoured lover, about six months, when, one hapless night, Josephine had placed the taper in her window as usual; and sat wishing the arrival of Albert in anxious expectation. More than once, she conjectured she heard his well-known footsteps approach the door. She flew to open it, and her eye fixed on vacancy alone; while the shed tears at the disappointment. Another, and another night elapsed; Albert came not; and Josephine's anguish and suspense became insupportable.

On the fourth morning of Albert's unusual absence, Josephine arose from her pallet after a few hours of restless and perturbed sleep: she approached the window, and her eyes taking their usual direction across the moor to the castle of Werdendorff, she beheld its gay banners streaming on the walls.

Anxious to learn the cause of this rejoicing, Josephine mingled with a groupe of rustic maidens who were repairing to the castle. She asked them, in tumultuous accents, what propitious event they were celebrating at the Chateau; but the villagers were as ignorant as herself. When they came to the outer portel of the edifice, they beheld a gay procession passing from the hall to the chapel.

The centinel, in reply to Josephine's interrogatories, informed her, that lord Albert was then gone to the chapel to seal his nuptial vows with lady Guimilda, the proud daughter of a neighbouring baron, whose possessions were immense, and she the sole heiress.

Josephine replied not: her heart was full, even to bursting. She retreated from her companions, and seeking the covert of a friendly wood, gave way to

all the frantic ravings of despair, which was still aggravated by every passing gale bearing along the echoes of the loud shouts of revelry that pervaded the castle, and proclaimed Albert's perjury, and her ruin.

As soon as the first violence of her grief was abated, she began to cherish delusive ideas. She thought the centinel might have deceived her; or, at least, he might have been in an error himself, in supposing lord Albert the bridegroom of the proud Guimilda; and she thought it more probable, that it was some friend of his, who had solemnized this marriage at Werden-lorff castle.

Cherishing this weak hope, she returned to her cottage; and partially disguising herself in a long mantle, and a thick white veil, she repaired at twilight to the castle, and, unobserved, mingled in the revelling crowd. But alas! the centinel's intelligence she soon found to be true; and the gayest among the gay throng was the false Albert and his bride Guimilda.

Once convinced, Josephine tarried no longer in the castle hall. With torturing sensations, and taultering steps,

she left the abode of her haughty rival and once more sought her lone dwelling. The night was dark, the wind shook the rushes, and all around, like her own heart, was drear and forlorn. With folded arms, and her whole person like the slave of despair, sat Josephine by the casement. Fond recollections caused her tears to flow, when she called to mind how oft in that window she had placed the taper to light her then ardent lover over the moor.

While she was thus reflecting, she heard footsteps approach her cottage door; and presently she heard her own name softly pronounced. She instantly recognized Lord Albert's voice; and opening the casement, she cried indignantly, "Away to Guimilda; away to the pleasures that reign in Werdendort castle. Why leave you my rival's bed to add another insult to the woes you have caused me!"

Lord Albert renewed his intreaties for admittance: and Josephine, at length, imprudently yielded to his request.

Albert exerted all his eloquence to convince the fair one that his heart

had no share in the nuptial contract with Guimilda; that there Josephine's image reigned triumphant, while her rival could claim nought but his hand. By the stern command of his father, he protested he had joined his fate to Guimilda's, who would only leave him his fortune on condition: but that his love to Josephine should never be diminished by that circumstance; but that he would transplant her to a pleasing abode, where she might reside in elegant retirement, and appear in a situation more congenial to his wishes than her present dwelling would allow or, indeed, her near vicinity to the castle render prudent.

The soft blanchiments of her deceiver again lured her to guile; and her anger was completely vanquished, by love.

Again was the board spread with the choice delicacies and delicious wines, that Lord Albert had brought with him from the castle: the flower-footed hours winged away with rapturous delight, and again the soft smile beamed on the lovely countenance of Josephine.

“ Adieu, my beloved, said lord

Albert; the first blush of morn empurples the east, and warns me from thy arms."

Josephine inquired affectionately when she was next to expect the loved lord. He replied, that he would return at the dark hour of midnight and again clasp her in his arms.

Lord Albert's bosom beat high as he sped homewards over the moor. The horrid deed he had committed, did not at that moment appal him. He congratulated himself on being freed from a mistress, whom satiety had for some past made him detest.

In relating to Josephine the cause of his marriage with the lady Guimilda, he had been guilty of a great falsehood. The known wealth of the heiress, at first, introduced lord Albert to visit at her father's villa; for avarice was a ruling passion with the youth. But when he beheld the haughty fair one, he instantly became a captive to her beauty, and loathed Josephine.

His nightly visits to Josephine, though conducted with such cautious secrecy, had, by some means, reached the ears of the proud Guimilda. No pity for the poor maid filled her

breast; she hated her fair rival, for having a prior claim to lord Albert's heart. Her revengeful temper made her feel that she should never enjoy perfect happiness while Josephine existed. She thought that there was more than probability, that, for all Albert's declarations to the contrary, when she conversed with him on the subject, that, after a short time would elapse, his heart might grow cold towards the legal partner of his fortune, and return with redoubled ardour to the deserted mistress. She knew the infirmities of her own temper; and the angelic sweetness of disposition which her informants had represented Josephine to possess, contrasted with her own hauteur, caprice, and tyranny, made the confirmation of her fears appear as strong as proofs of holy writ.

To glut her revenge, and leave no room for apprehension, she formed the horrid project of demanding the following sacrifice at the hands of lord Albert.

This was the removal of Josephine from the terrestrial world by a poison which should take a quick effect, and cause her to breathe her last ere she

should have time to reveal the name of her murderer. The time fixed on by Guimilda for the perpetration of this horrid deed, was their wedding night. Albert was to make some plausible excuse to his guests, to account for absenting himself at that time, and then to repair to Josephine's cottage; and as he always, on these occasions, condescended to convey with his own hands, some refreshments, it would be an easy matter for him to infuse into the goblet of wine that he should present to his fair victim, a deadly but tasteless drug that Guimilda prepared for that fatal purpose. The prone Guimilda made a solemn vow, never to admit lord Albert to her bed, till her terrific demand was complied with.

Alas! her destined husband was too pliantly moulded to her purpose; he made not half the resistance she expected to encounter; but after a very few scruples, signified his perfect acquiescence with the will of the fiend in female form.

How lord Albert affected, his purpose has been previously detailed. He had nearly gained the castle on his return when his own words incurred to him

memory : at the dark hour of midnight he would again return, and clasp her in his arms. " Ill-fated maiden ! (exclaimed he, mentally,) ere that hour arrives, thy fluttering breath will flee amid agonizing pain ; and thou, late so beautiful, will be a lifeless corpse." The first light of the morning cheerfully illumined the dell. But Albert's heart was not gladdened by the scene. The beams of the sun began to gild the turrets of Werdendorff, yet the bridal ball was not concluded. In vain the blaze of beauty met lord Albert's eyes ; he sighed amid surrounding splendour ; for conscience had strong y entwined her heart. Guimilda was impatient to know if her lord had accomplished the dire deed ; and, on his answering in the affirmative, she experienced the most extravagant and unnatural transports. But Albert was clouded with horror ; and he kept constantly repeating the word, " at midnight's dark hour thou shalt embrace me again."

On the next evening the guests again assembled in Werdendorff hall ; again the musicians tuned their instruments to notes of joy ; and again the gay

knights and their fair partners, joined in the mazy dance. Lord Albert alone seemed abstracted; and his woe expressive countenance gave rise to a variety of conjectures, all very remote from the truth. Guimilda perceived the agony of his mind (which her hardened heart considered as a weakness) with extreme displeasure: nor was she slow in whispering to him the most keen reproaches for the pusillanimity of his conduct, in appearing in this manner before their guests.

But in vain lord Albert endeavoured to arouse himself, and put on a gay unembarrassed air. His mind in a few hours, had undergone a total revolution. He now regarded Guimilda as an agent of infernal malice, sent to plunge his soul into an irremediable abyss of guilt. The artless behaviour of his murdered love was the contrast to her gentle upbraiding manners, the affectionate looks with which she would hang enraptured over him, and listen to the tender oaths he had so basely violated—Distraction was in these thoughts; yet they every moment rushed unbidden on his brain.

As midnight's dark hour was pro-

aimed by the turret bell, Albert's limbs shook with fear. "I hear, said he aloud, the fatal summons that calls me hence. Guimilda, farewell for ever this is thy work."

Guimilda was going to make some reply, when a tremendous storm suddenly shook the battlements of the castle: thunder's loud peals burst on the ancient walls; while the lightning's pointed glare flashed with appalling repetition through the painted casements. Dim burnt the numberless tapers; when Josephine's death-like form glided from the portal, and, with solemn pace proceeded along the hall to the spot where Lord Albert stood. Pale was her face; and her features seemed to retain the convulsive marks of the horrid death to which Guimilda had revengefully consigned her. Clad in the habiliments of the grave, her appearance was awe-inspiring. In a hollow deep-toned voice, she addressed her perjured lover:

"Thou false one! Base assassin of her whom thou lured from the flowery paths of virtue; her whom thou hadst sworn to cherish and protect while life was left thee. Thou hast cut short the

the thread of my existence: but this not to escape the punishment due thy crimes. 'Tis midnight's dark hour; the hour by thyself appointed delay not, therefore, thy promise embrace."

With these words Josephine wound her arms around his trembling form. "I am come from the confines of the dead, said she, to make thee fulfil thy parting promise." She dragged him by a force he could not resist to her breast: she pressed her clammy lips to his; and held him fast in her noisome icy embrace.

At length the horrific spectre released him from her grasp. He started back in breathless agony, and sank on the floor. Thrice he raised his frenzied eyes to gaze on his supernatural visitant: thrice he raised his hands, as to implore the mercy of offended heaven; and then expired with a heavy groan.

Again loud thunder shook the castle to its very foundation. The affrighted guests rushed from the hall, rather choosing to brave the fury of the elements, than remain spectators of the horrid scene within its walls. Eve

he proud Guimilda fled with terror and dismay. She sought refuge in a convent that stood about a league's distance from the castle: here she remained till death put a period to her mental sufferings, which far exceeded her corporeal ones; though they were many, and severe; for she exhausted her frame by the variety and frequencies of the vigorous penance she imposed on herself, as a chastisement for her heinous, regretted crime.

As soon as Lord Albert's body was interred, the domestics hastily left the horrid castle. The edifice, being greatly damaged by the storm, soon fell to decay. Its dismantled ramparts were skirted with thorns; and the broken turrets of Werendorff lay scattered on the plain.

Full oft when the traveller wanders among the time-stricken ruin, a peasant will lead him to his cot, and relate the sad story of Albert and Josephine, and warn the stranger not to rove among the avenues of the castle lest he should be assailed by the grim spectres, who always punish the temerity of those who intrude with unallowed steps in the mansion where they

keep their mysterious orgies. The hall of the castle still remains entire amid the gothic ruins. On the anniversary of that fatal night when Josephine's spectre gave the midnight embrace to the false Albert, the same scene is again acted by supernatural beings Guimilda, her husband, and his murdered love, traverse the haunted hall which is then illumined with a more than mortal light; and the groans of the spectre lord can be heard afar while he is clasped in the arms of Josephine's implacable ghost.

Often will the village maidens, at the sober gloom of evening, review the isolated scene, and relate to those of their juvenile companions, yet unacquainted with the tragic tale, all the particulars of that wondrous legend while they shuddering pass the mouldering tomb that covers the libertine's remains to weep over the lowly violet-covered grave (for the spot has always been marked on each revolving year with sedulous care) of the fair, but frail Josephine.

From the preceding tale we may extract this moral; that, had the lovely maiden preserved her virtue from

the snares of a seducer, she had still been happy ; or even had she repulsed him, as she ought, when conscious of his being married to Guimilia, she had escaped the death to which her haughty rival decreed her. Thus virtue is a female's firmest protector.

THE DANGER OF PLEASURES.

A DERVICH, remarkable for the sanctity of his life, entered the shop of a confectioner. The master to regale the holy man, presented him with a bowl of honey ; but scarce had he uncovered it, when a legion of flies made a descent upon it. The confectioner took up a fan to disperse them : such as had posted themselves on the edge of the bowl, easily escaped ; but they that were more greedy, had precipitated themselves into the middle, and, caught by the tenacious honey, could not take their flight.

The dervich, plunged into deep meditation, viewed the object with an attentive eye ; recovering from his reverie, he fetched a sigh, which the confectioner, in surprise, asked him the reason of.

"This bowl, says the dervich, "is the world, and these flies are its inhabitants: they that lodged on the rim of it, resemble those prudent persons, who prescribing bounds to their desires, do not madly immerse themselves in pleasures, but rest contented with tasting them: the flies that rushed into the middle of the bowl, represent such, as giving a loose to their inordinate appetites, abandon themselves without restraint to every species of voluptuousness.

"When the angel of death, traversing with rapid motion, the surface of the earth, shall shake his wings, they who shall have stopped on the edge of this world, will, free and unincumbered, take their flight towards the celestial country; but such as, enslaved by their passions, shall have plunged themselves into the poisoned bowl of sensuality, will sink deeper still, and be precipitated into the abyss."

FINIS.

